He Was, He Is, He Will Be

By P. A. Penner

15 cm.

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He Was--He Is--He Will Be

He was only a "chamar," one of the seventy-five million untouchables and unapproachables; one of those whose very shadow, in some parts of India, defiles. He never dared to come within ear shot when the Vedas were read. His home was a simple mud hut with a leaky roof. In front of it was a small, a very small yard where his boy in his birthday clothes was rolling in the dust. During the day, he, our untouchable friend, was busy on his fields which he prepared with the simple, primitive farming implements such as his father, his grandfather and who knows how many fathers before him had used. If the rain came in sufficient quantity, the family had two meals per day; if they failed, only one. On quiet evenings, after the day's work, he squatted with his neighbors under the peepal tree "swapping" stories and commenting on the events of the day.

Not many changes came into his monotonous life. One day was like all the others. Here and there, however, he was compelled, like the children of Israel in Egypt, to do conscriptive service. Compulsory labor is not unknown in India. Pay? Nothing. A school he had never attended. Books, papers, and magazines

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were consequently not found in his hut. His wife was ignorant. But in spite of poverty, ignorance, and other handicaps he and his wife were happy, for had not the gods given them a son?

But a change came and with it a new theme for the evening conversations. A missionary located not so very far from his little hut. Much of the conversation of the common Hindoo centers about the Sahib and his doings. Naturally, many questions arose in the minds of those who met every evening for a little chat before turning in for the night. Who is this new Sahib? Where did he come from? What will he do? Why is he building his bungalow so near to where we outcasts live? Will he be kind to us? Does he speak our language, etc., etc. But when the work on the bungalow started and many workmen were needed, our chamar friend soon found employment during those seasons of the year when his fields did not need his special attention. He soon learned that the Sahib was a friend to all, including outcasts. Every week he received his wages without any disputing or quarreling; his word was a word, and above all he appeared to be different than ome other Sahibs with whom he had come in contact.

He had not worked many days on the construction of the bungalow before he

learned that this Sahib had a new message. He had told the villagers that there is only one God and only one Saviour who can save from sin. This was indeed new. Until now, our friend had been taught and had believed that there are many gods and many ways of salvation. Did not the Hindoos call upon Ram, Krishna, Mahadev, etc., and did not the Hindoos go to various shrines in India in order to get salvation? Was all this untrue? No, that could not be the case. The Hindoos could not have been so misguided by their Brahman priests for thousands of years. The Sahib was wrong. And if he was right, what he said was only for white people. Have my fields not given me my rice when I called upon Sat Nam? (True Name.) Have the gods not given us a son? No, no, Sahib, you are all wrong—And yet, how the Sahib prays! Why, he speaks to God as though he were right near. He calls him father. He tells him everything. Have I not heard him pray: "O heavenly Father, bless our children and bless the workmen on this building that no accident may befall them?" And how sweet the singing! Perhaps there is some truth in what he tells us. I will investigate. Night after night as he sat, not with his neighbors under the peepal tree, but on the steps of the missionary's home, he would listen and question. Who is this God about

whom you speak and whom you so intimately call father? Who is this Jesus, who lived, died, and rose again? How can he forgive sins? What offering must people bring? Does he care for untouchables too? Will he permit a chamar to come near him? Is an outcaste, such as I am, permitted to listen when His Holy Book is read? Such and hundreds of other questions were asked the missionary. Though our friend became thoughtful, he WAS nevertheless a chamar, an untouchable, an outcaste.

Carefully, tactfully and prayerfully these and many other questions were answered. The Holy Spirit watered the seed sown in the heart of this questioning chamar. Signs of an awakening were becoming more and more evident. It was not many weeks when our friend came to the Sahib with questions, often previously asked: "What must I do to be saved?" "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." "Is that all?" Yes that is all, give your heart to the Lord about whom I have been telling you and you shall be saved." "But —will not my people cast me off?" "Yes, I think that they will; it will mean a real sacrifice for you. 'He that doth not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me,' is what the Lord says and if you desire to follow Him, you will have to bear persecution."

Many days of questioning on the part of the chamar, much prayer on the part of the missionary followed, till finally the Lord won. Our friend, the outcaste, came to the missionary and asked to be baptized. It was a glorious day when he confessed Christ. The angels in heaven must have rejoiced. In his neighborhood, however, there was consternation. It is possible that our neighbor has really left the faith of our fathers and accepted the faith of the sarkar? (Government). Then he is no longer one of us, he cannot eat with us, we will not eat with him. Here our roads part, and when his boy is of the marriageable age we will see to it that he gets no wife for him. But imagine the pain of the new convert when his wife too, scorned and spurned him. "You have become a Christian?" "Yes, I have promised to follow Jesus and I will confess Him before men. I am happy because my sins are forgiven, will you not also become a Christian?" "Follow you and become a Christian? Never. I will not only not become a Christian, but I will leave you immediately." How our brother's heart must have cried out as he saw his wife whom he loved and the boy to whom he clung with a father's heart walk out of the house which had been such a happy home, humble though it was. "Lord, give me the strength to bear this too, for Thy

name's sake," was his prayer.

The brother was now alone in his mud hut. How lonely the days, how heavy the heart! He had now to cook his own meals, since no former friends would give him anything to eat. Frequently he went to the missionary for comfort which was always given. He paid a big price in order to be a Christian.

True to his promise the Lord did help him to bear all the persecution to which he was subjected. He did still more for this lonely, persecuted Christian. He blessed his fields; when the fields of his neighbors had one-half or less of a crop, his fields yielded abundently. But there was a reason for this. Did he not stand near his fields and pray to God to give him a harvest? His neighbors were compelled to see that his fields yielded more than theirs. They noticed too, that a wonderful change had come over him. He was a humble, unassuming man; he did not, as formerly, give galli (abuse), he did not give "an eye for an eye," he did not work on Sundays, etc., etc. But the Lord had still greater blessings in store for the Christian than watering his fields. One day, who should stand before him but his wife and son. They had returned to be with the husband and father. Immediately, he went to the missionary and said: "Sahib, my wife and son have returned, let us thank the Lord." From

that hour on his faith was almost unlimited. He believed God could do everything through prayer. Is he right? All matters, whether great or small, he brought to God. How well I remember the day when the cattle of his village were dying of some cattle disease. His bullocks, too, were taken sick. The villagers thought that his cattle, like their own, would surely die. But what happened? He came running to the bungalow and asked us to come and pray with him for his bullocks. We left the meal unfinished and prayed for his bullocks in the barn. The bullocks did not die. In a few days they were well. If he had lost his cattle, his faith would have received a severe shock and besides that, how should he have cultivated his fields? How could he have stood up before his friends and said, "Our God is a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God."

The erstwhile ignorant chamar, now a saint, learned to read. His textbook was the Bible and oh how he pored over its sacred pages! If he did not understand a passage, the missionary or some other Christian was soon busy explaining its hidden meaning. He is now at home in God's Word. The Bible was his best friend and continual companion, whether at home or elsewhere. What was more natural than that should begin to testify to the saving and keeping power of the

Christian's God after all these wonderful experiences and blessings. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of people, have heard his simple message and his hearty invitation to come to the "fountain filled with blood."—How well we remember when one day he asked for a magnet. "What do you want to do with that?" he was asked. "Well, I am going to take this to the village and by this magnet show the people the drawing power of the cross." No wonder that he stood before the missionary one day and said: "Sahib, I have brought these two friends who have confessed Christ. Will you baptize them?" And who can tell how many more will eventually be found in heaven who have heard his simple message?

Prosperity followed him. His hut became a house. His meagre income was not now only from his few fields, but he undertook contract work. He was so faithful and conscientious in all of his work that he had more contracts offered him than he could possibly accept. And all of these contracts from non-Christians. His life, his work, his everything spoke of the wonderful change of his heart. Never did he permit any of his workmen to work on the Sabbath day. Instead of that he collected them and had a Christian service with them. A happier Christian is hard to find. His smile does not wear off.

Now the devil came into his life in a very special way. He said to our new Christian as to God: "And Satan answered Jehovah and said, skin for skin, yea, all that man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thy hand now and touch his bone and flesh, and he will renounce thee to thy face." God, as in Job's case, permitted the devil to touch our convert. Not by the disease of Job, but a slow paralyzing trouble has come over this brother. First one arm, then one leg, now both arms are are affected and still the disease is progressing. He cannot walk, he cannot use one arm and only with difficulty the other arm. He is slowly, to all appearances dying. Does he now forsake his God? Does his faith waver? Does he follow the advice Job's wife gave to her husband? Does his smile wear off in this terrible calamity? Praise God, not until now! He is the same happy smiling Christian that we was when first converted. Only a few Sundays ago, he asked permission to speak in the church at Champa. This request was granted with pleasure. Willing hands helped him into the auto and then he was brought from the hospital in Champa to the church on the mission premises. Having arrived in the church, he was placed on a chair in front of the pulpit. From this place he spoke to us of Job and his trouble. Then, without applying the story to himself, he exhorted his

hearers not to leave God in time of prosperity or adversity. Who else but he could say this with the force of this Christian layman? He was intensely serious and said to all of us: "Don't leave your God." As I sat and listened to his simple story, my thoughts wandered just a little bit. I thought of what the speaker HAD BEEN. He WAS a chamar, an untouchable, unapproachable, an outcaste for whom none of the high caste Hindoos care. He was persecuted, he was despised, but NOW he is a SAINT. He is the child of the living God. He is a soul winner. He is a giant in faith.

Now what WILL HE BE? He will be an heir. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptable, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, RESERVED for you in heaven." I Peter 1:3, 4. As he nears the portals of heaven I can hear his Master say: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Strike into the harps, ye heavenly orchestra, escort him to the mansion that is prepared for him. Give him a royal welcome ye saints of old, for Sukhibai of Janjgir, the once outcaste chamar, is coming home.

—P. A. Penner

Published by
LITERATURE COMMITTEE
Women's Home and Foreign
Missionary Association
General Conference Mennonites
of
North America
1944